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An amusing little Essay -

Inaugural Dissertation

Read March 28th. 1825

on the

Sanguinaria Canadensis

By

Charles Innes

Easton
Pennsylvania —

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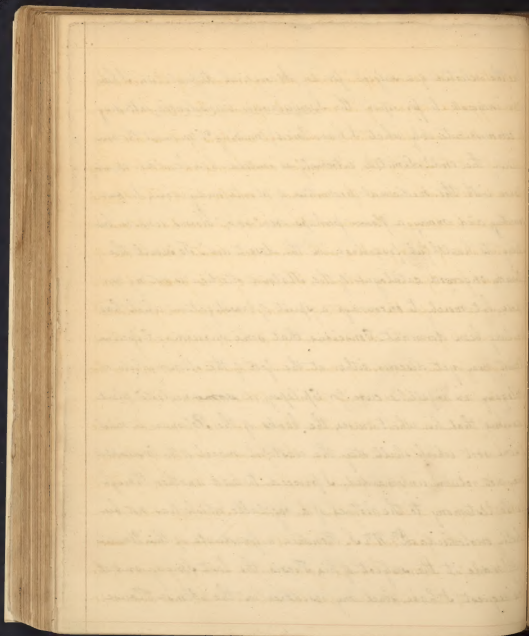
By

Charles James

London

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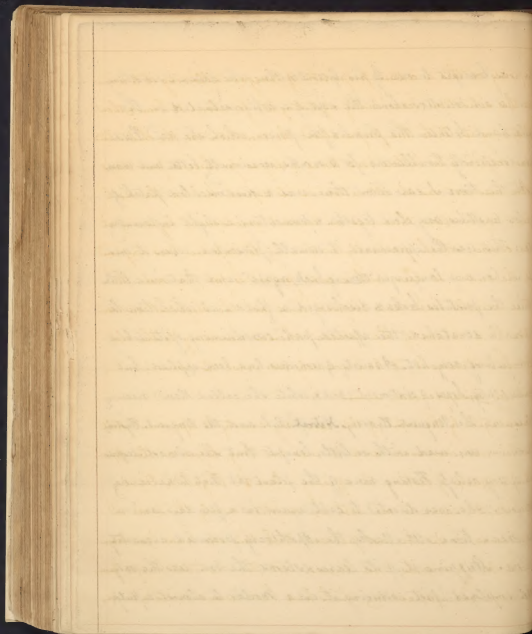
In the selection of a subject for an Inaugural Dissertation, I have
been induced to fix upon the Sanguinaria Canadensis, intending
to communicate only what I have tried, making "Effacement the near-
ly the end." Limited, extremely so indeed, has been our acquain-
tance with the medicinal properties of plants indigenous to our
country, and many a flower perhaps even "blooms unseen be-
neath its healthful fragrance in the desert air." To swell the
already engorged catalogue of the Materia Medica is not my pur-
pose, but merely to encourage a spirit of investigation, which has
long been dormant. Conscious that some succeeding Experi-
mentalist may yet discover, either at the foot of the Monongahela or
Allegheny, an infallible cure for Epilepsy, in ~~some~~ neglected plant,
hoping that he who traverses the banks of the Potomac, in search
of some root which shall stay the wasteful march of the Consumption,
may not return unrewarded, I proceed to add another, though
trifling testimony, to the virtues of a vegetable, which has not been
fully overlooked: Dr. Wm. S. Hendrie a Graduate of this Univer-
sity made it the subject of his Thesis, the last Spring, and at
his request, I have since my residence in the Arms-Flower,



repeated and varied experiments, all confirmatory of the remarks then suggested, respecting its remedial efficacy. To enter into a detailed Botanical description, or chemical analysis of it, is not my design; but to specify the particular complaints in which it has proved serviceable, and the manner of employing it. The Sanguinaria Canadensis - Puccoon or Blood Root is peculiar to our country, and of the vegetables with which our forests abound, one of the most beautiful and delicate. The root of it is perennial, containing a considerable quantity of a reddish or rather orange-coloured juice, which from the circumstance of its being employed by the Indians for the purpose of ornamenting themselves, and dyeing their baskets, has given it one of its popular titles - Indian Paint.

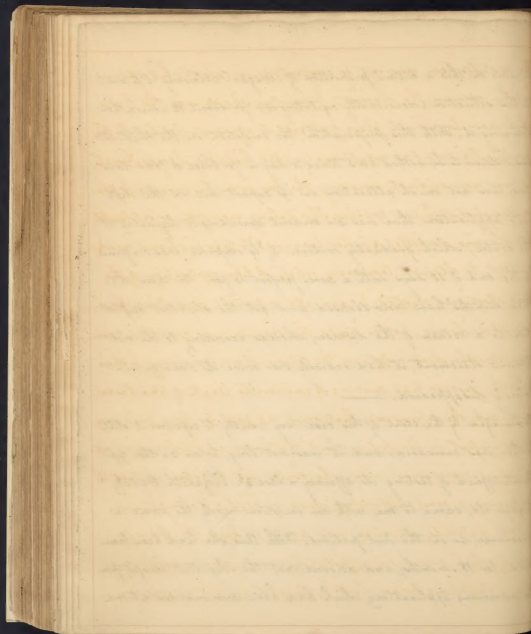
- It flowers in this state when the season is favourable, about the last of March, and even in the common weather of Spring months, may be always found in bloom about the first of April. As the report of its success in the cure of Impetigo was so encouraging, the first cases in which it was employed, were ~~these~~ in this class. James Francis, aged 7 years, belonging to one of the outwards of the Institution, was the subject of the first Experiment.

He was brought to me by his grandmother, who desired something
done for an eruption about the size of a dollar, situated on the
right hand between the thumb & fore-finger, which she said had
been excessively troublesome for 6 months, occasionally better and worse.
At the time I saw him, there was a circumscribed patch of
yellow pustules, very close together & presenting a slight inflammatory
edge. This was the appearance it usually presented, when it was,
to use her own language, "coming back again", and that in a little
while the pustules broke & discharged a fluid - at which time he
invariably scratched the affected part, complaining of its itching
and feeling very hot. A variety of remedies had been applied, but
unsuccessfully; boxes of ointment (red & white she called them) meaning
presume, the Unguent. Hydrag. Nitrat. Rub. and the Unguent. Hydrag.
Sulphuratus, were used with so little benefit, that she almost despair-
ed of any relief. Having none of the plant at that time in my
possession, she was directed to call again in a few days, and in
the mean time, Mr. Marks the Apothecary procured a quantity
for me. Stripping it of its leaves & stems, the root was the only
part employed, first reducing it in a Mortar to almost a pulp,



infusing on this a certain proportion of Vinegar - allowing it to remain in this situation (occasionally agitating it) for about 12 hours, then straining it. With this preparation, the eruption on the child's head was ordered to be bathed 4 or 5 times a day - for three or four days there was not much alteration in its aspect; but on the sixth day's application, there was an evident amendment beginning at the centre, which gradually continuing to improve, was confirmed at the end of 10 days with a cure, perfect so far, for more than three months have now elapsed, and not the slightest disposition to a return of the disease; whereas according to the old Woman's statement, it had scarcely ever since its commencement, entirely disappeared. —

Encouraged by the event of this case, my anxiety to experiment still farther was increased; and it was not long, before another opportunity offered of testing its efficacy - Case 2^d. Elizabeth Davie, 12 years old, came to me, with an eruption nearly the same in appearance, as in the first patient. With this she had been troubled for 18 months, and derived not the slightest benefit from the numerous applications, which had been recommended & tried.

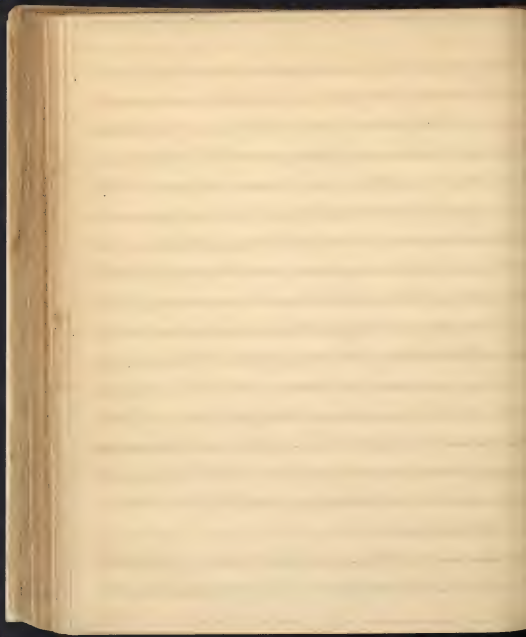


The pustules here, were not so compact as in case 1st - but assumed
in some measure the character of Sonchitis Sparsa - on the hand
which was its original place of attack, it appeared similar to the
Varicella Fournet, as mentioned in the history of James Francis.
It has now evidently invading the fore-arm, in irregular & pro-
miscuously-distributed patches. The itching was often so intolerable
that she was compelled (in her language) "to tear her hand nearly
pieces" to obtain a temporary relief. A like application of the
Wood-Root was resorted to, and after a patient and steady perse-
verance in its use, for two weeks, the eruption was completely reme-
died - smooth, shining spots on the cuticle alone remaining; to show
here the disease had existed: A considerable length of time has now
elapsed, and she informs me, that since the pustules have dried away
she can assist in her duties about the house as Mashemum "with-
out any inconvenience," which she could not do before without its
producing a most distressing sense of heat & itching. —
In both patients, attention was paid to keep the Bowels
quiet, which was easily effected by small and repeated doses
than of Sulphur & Cream Tart. or Sulph. Sodae and Magnesia.



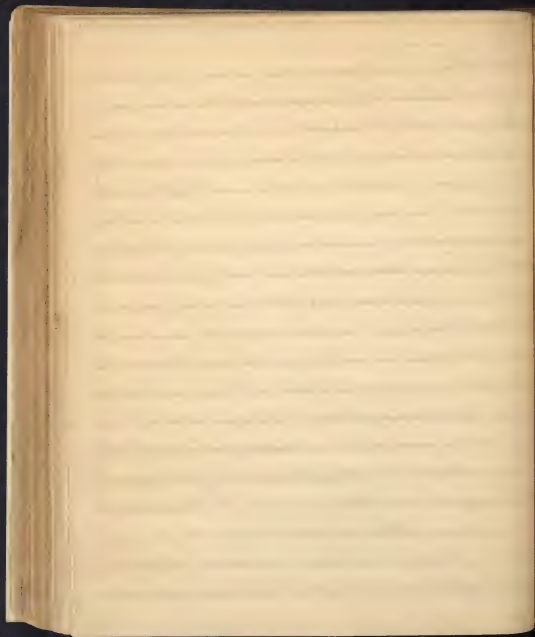
The happy issue of these two cases, justified the conclusion, that it possessed no ordinary properties, and merited the more general attention of the Profession: Rheumatic affections are at best, tedious & troublesome to contend with; baffling frequently the most persevering exertions, causing even Practitioners to become dissatisfied with the impotence of their remedies & making the patient despondent. — Having charge about this time of the Ellens' Select Ward, to which all cutaneous disorders are generally sent; two cases of Tinea Capitis, came under my notice, which had resisted every attempt at their cure. Tar ointment — the Camph. Mercurial ointment, and what is known in the Hms-House by the name of Gibber's ointment, which had been uniformly successful, seemed to make no impression whatever on the disease; and with these facts before me, I felt almost disposed, to abandon them as hopeless. — The Sanguinaria Canadensis however recurred to me, and I tried it merely for experiment sake — with what advantage, a recital of the following cases will exhibit —

Roger Scantling aged 9 years, was brought from one of the Nurseries, where Tinea Capitis, appeared to be a contagion; for 8, 13 or 14

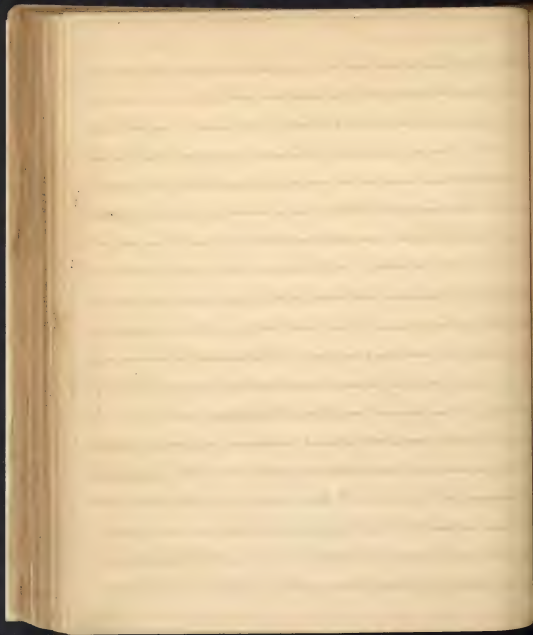


children; there was scarcely one, who was not more or less affected;—
and this I attributed to their sleeping in pairs, and one combing
a Q.S. for the whole. The majority of them got well from the use
of the ointment introduced into the practice of this House, by Dr.
Gibson, composed of Sulphur—carb. Ammoniac & Hog's Lard, with
the exception of two, whose cases are now to be detailed —

The common routine of practice had been gone through, and yet
Scantling's disease proved inveterate. I directed his head to be
shaved, and well cleansed with Castile Soap daily — an occasi-
onal dose of medicine to regulate his alimentary canal, and the
ulcers on the scalp, to be washed repeatedly, with the same liquid,
which had been employed in Impetigo: His diet was rather nu-
tritious than otherwise; allowing him Beef & Mutton, but restric-
ting salt provisions. After an unremitting continuance in this
plan of treatment for 8 or 9 days, the sores on the head began to
heal kindly — the scabs falling off, and at the termination of a
two weeks' course of gutt. Wood-Rose system, I enjoyed the pleasure of
discharging him cured. Since then he has remained perfectly free
from the complaint & scarcely a vestige of the disease is observable.



John Barthely 6 years of age, was another patient in the Ward, labouring under the same malady, connected with this, he also had a scrophulous ulcer on the neck. This being likewise a very obstinate case, there was a repetition of the same practice; and though the improvement was not so rapid here as in the above instance, yet at the close of the third week, I could in reality say "Ham regi Opus". The ulcer was still unattended to, and being absent from the house, for three days, the Nurse had (for what reason I know not) bathed it frequently with some of the liquid, which remained in the Vial. On my return to the Ward, noticing the altered appearance of the neck, far from being an open-ill-looking sore, it was now rising, filling up; my curiosity prompted me to ask the cause of this change, when the Nurse informed me, that the Panacea as he styled it, had been the sole agent. No internal medicines were administered, & nothing resorted to, but a topical application of the Sanguinaria Canadensis. These facts, with those mentioned in Dr. Ferriar's Thesis, are sufficient I should suppose, to elicit at least, farther inquiries into its reputed virtues; and ascertain whether or not it is entitled to more extensive trial. That it will succeed



irrevocably, is saying that which at any period, would be scarcely justifiable; but more especially, when it has been subjected to so few experiments. In those which have just been related, decided benefit resulted to the patients; which authorizes the inference, that in similar cases, similar will be the consequences. To the title of 'Specie', it presumes no claims - uncertainty can be inscribed on it, as on other remedies, which should not detract wholly from its merits, for Experience may yet attest, that when all other known applications have failed in long-standing Impetigo or ineterate Tinea, recourse to the Blood-Root has been advantageous. I have in some instances, used an ointment of the dried root pulverized and mixed with Hog Lard; but it has not realized my expectations, for its efficacy seems expended in the process of Exsiccation.

Thus far has my own observation gone, relative to the present subject. To me it was new & untrodden ground, which will account for the irregular courses, & deviations from the beaten path, of correct arrangement. Should they however conduct me at last, to the destined point, a mitigation of any of the ills incident to humanity, I shall be satisfied; & reflect with pleasure, that though my contributions to the general stock,

have not been very ample; I have even like the poor Widow,
added a Mite —

The Modus operandi of this medicine is what I cannot undertake
to explain, and speculation on the subject would perhaps be attended
with no very important results. Astringency is certainly one of its
characteristics, but whether its effects depend on this quality is doubt-
ful, as there are many articles superior to it in this respect, from
the application of which no benefit accrued: With the fact of its
having done good, I must therefore be content, and say of it,
what has been said of other remedies, —

"Causa latet, vis est notissima".

Since writing the above, in a conversation with D. Stout of Bel-
lehem Pa: on this subject, he informed me, that a Tincture of the
Sanguinaria Canadensis, had been employed by him, in a number
of cases of *Impetigo*, with the most decided advantage —

